

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MUSCAT 1826

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, MU
SUBJ: RUMORED MINISTERIAL CHANGES IN OMAN

1. UPPER LEVEL OMANI OFFICIALS ARE EXPECTING SULTAN QABOOS TO MAKE SEVERAL CABINET CHANGES IN NEAR FUTURE, POSSIBLY THIS WEEK OR NEXT. BASED ON WHAT EMBASSY HAS HEARD, CHANGES WOULD NOT REPRESENT POLICY ADJUSTMENTS BUT WOULD BE INTENDED TO ENERGIZE CERTAIN MINISTRIES AND TO ENCOURAGE MUTUAL INTER-CHANGE AND COOPERATION AMONG CABINET DEPARTMENTS.

2. IN COURSE OF DEC. 27 DINNER AT EMBASSY, SAYYID TARIK BIN TAIMUR TOLD AMBASSADOR THAT SIGNS POINTED TO EARLY DECISION BY THE SULTAN AFFECTING SEVERAL PRESENT MINISTERS. HE REMARKED THAT SHM IS UNHAPPY THAT SOME MINISTERS WHO HAVE BEEN MAKING SMALL FORTUNES FOR THEMSELVES BY COMBINING GOVERNMENT AND BUSINESS ACTIVITIES HAVE FAILED TO INVEST PART OF THIS MONEY IN PRODUCTIVE MANNER WITHIN OMAN. ALSO, SULTAN WAS SAID TO FEEL THAT DESPITE HIS OCCASIONAL ADMONITIONS, SOME OF HIS CABINET HAVE FAILED TO COOPERATE WITH THEIR COLLEAGUES BY RENDERING HELPFUL ADVICE AND SUGGESTIONS BUT INSTEAD HAVE PROCEEDED SOLELY WITH THEIR OWN NARROW RESPONSIBILITIES AS THOUGH WHAT OTHERS DO IS NONE OF THEIR CONCERN. A FEW DAYS AGO, SAID TARIK, TWO MINISTERS WHO HAD PUT IN FOR PALACE APPROVAL OF TRIPS ABROAD WERE TURNED

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DOWN ON GROUNDS THEY SHOULD STICK AROUND TO AWAIT POSSIBLE CABINET RESHUFFLE.

3. SAYYID TARIK SAID THAT BASED ON QABOOS' PRESENT FRAME OF MIND, LIKELY CHANGES INCLUDE SPLITTING OF PRESENT MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES, PETROLEUM AND MINERALS IN HALF, WITH AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES PORTFOLIO POSSIBLY GOING TO SAYYID

FAISAL BIN ALI, PRESENT MINISTER OF NATIONAL HERITAGE. FAISAL WOULD BE REPLACED BY MIN INTERIOR MUHAMMAD BIN AHMAD. THE MINISTER OF DIWAN AFFAIRS, HAMID BIN HAMUD, WITH WHOM SULTAN "IS DISPLEASED", WOULD BE RELIEVED; AMONG CANDIDATES FOR REPLACING HIM ARE PRESENT MIN INFORMATION AND CULTURE, SAYYID THUWALNI BIN SHIHAB. ALSO, DIWAN UNDERSECRETARY MAQBUL HAMID WOULD BE SHIFTED TO SIMILAR POST IN RELATIVELY NEW MINISTRY OF YOUTH AFFAIRS, WHICH TO SAYYID TARIK'S WAY OF THINKING IS ONE OF OMANGOV'S MOST VITAL DEPARTMENTS IF MIDDLE AND LONG-RANGE STABILITY IS TO BE ASSURED.

4. THOUGH NOT OENTIONED BY TARIK, SOME SOURCES HAVE AGAIN RECENTLY RESURRECTED LAST YEAR'S RUMORS THAT FOREIGN MINISTER QAIS ZAWAWI SOON MAY BE RELIEVED OF THAT PORTFOLIO TO CONCEN- TRATE ON CHAIRMANSHIPS OF FINANCIAL AFFAIRS AND DEVELOPMENT COUNCILS, WITH UNDERSEC YUSUF AL-ALAWI MOVING UP TO THE MINISTERIAL SLOT.

5. COMMENT: MINISTERIAL CHANGES IN OMAN ARE SUFFICIENTLY INFREQUENT THAT NO ONE HAS BEEN ABLE TO BUILD UP A TRACK RECORD FOR SUCCESSFULLY PREDICTING WHEN THEY WILL OCCUR OR WHO WILL BE AFFECTED. BUT WITH SAYYID TARIK HAVING BEEN LARGELY IN OMAN RATHER THAN IN HAMBURG SINCE EARLY NOVEMBER, AND WITH HIS ACCESS TO THE TOP BEING AS GOOD AS IT IS, WE WILL BE SURPRISED IF AT LEAST SOME OF HIS COMMENTS ARE NOT PROVEN ACCURATE.

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